



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/STEVE KEESEE

**Eric Bost**, undersecretary for food, nutrition and consumer services for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, presented a bonus check for \$3.9 million Monday to the Arkansas' Department of Human Services for its management of the state's food stamp program, at a ceremony at the department's offices in Conway.

# Agency gets \$3.9 million bonus

## Department rewarded for lack of errors with food stamps

BY MICHELLE HILLEN  
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

**CONWAY** — The state Department of Human Services received a \$3.9 million check Tuesday as a reward for its low error rate in administering and distributing food stamps last year.

Arkansas, which has won the award eight out of the last nine years, is one of 12 states and a territory that qualified for the bonus, said Eric Bost, undersecretary for food, nutrition and consumer services for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The federal awards funds also went to: New Jersey, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Minnesota, Louisiana, Texas, South Dakota, Wyoming, Arizona, Hawaii and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Last year, Arkansas' error rate was less than one-half the national average, Bost said.

"This means the state is be-

ing good stewards of taxpayer dollars," he said. "It means the people who are coming in are getting exactly what they are supposed to get, not too much nor too little."

This year's award brings Arkansas's total award funds through this program to \$24 million over the last nine years, said Joni Jones, director of the state department's Division of County Operations.

The \$3.9 million will be spent primarily on staff training and computer upgrades, Jones said. In the past, the money has been used for staff training and a new computer system that links all department computers, Jones said.

"To be able to have that money to train staff and to improve computer technology so we can improve our service delivery to a growing population is a great thing," Jones said.

In 2002, the department's

food stamp program distributed \$256 million in benefits to 433,000 Arkansans. The program is administered in 86 offices across the state.

Tuesday's award was made at the Faulkner County Department of Human Services office in Conway because of its participation in testing the new computer system, Jones said.

Gov. Mike Huckabee was scheduled to attend but canceled because of a doctor's appointment for torn cartilage in his left knee.

According to Huckabee spokesman Rex Nelson, the injury was probably caused when Huckabee was getting out of his boat, and it was aggravated by his current exercise routine.

The governor will undergo outpatient surgery Monday morning and is expected to resume a normal schedule within days.